

Fightback Issue #1 2015

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



**Special
Housing
Issue**

\$2

ISSN 1177-074

Publication information

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Within NZ: \$20 for one year (11 issues) or \$40 for two years (22 issues)

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Fightback, PO Box 10282

Dominion Rd, Auckland

or

Bank transfer:

38-9002-0817250-01

Table of Contents

- 3 Editorial
- 4 Fightback plans for 2015 and beyond
- 6 Housing under neoliberalism
- 7 Housing: Foreign ownership is not the problem
- 8 Desperate people: Christchurch's slum dwellers
- 10 Venezuela: Possibilities and challenges
- 11 Urban Housing is an Ecosocialist Issue
- 13 Living Outside The Rainbow: Queerness and the Housing Crisis

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Fightback magazine is now in its 20th year as we continue the long-term fight for socialism. Readers and supporters may consider remembering us in their will with assets or money that will help the struggle in the long-term. If this is you please put in your will 'Fightback, PO Box 10-282, Dominion Road, Auckland' as well as what you would like to leave to us.

In late January, Fightback held our annual internal conference to plan for the coming year (see pX-X). Since more people access Fightback content through the website and social media than our magazine, we agreed to move to a less regular publication schedule, using the magazine for analytical themed issues. We begin 2015 with an issue on the national housing crisis.

At the time of writing, Key's National government recently backed down from a \$140 million taxpayer bailout of SkyCity. As highlighted on social media, this proposed figure is nearly twice the budget of India's mission to Mars. It's also money that could go into expanding public housing, as the government sells it off to NGOs and churches – especially if the billions sequestered in tax havens are unlocked.

At present, the fight for public housing (like the fight for all things public) is largely defensive. Although Tamaki Makaurau's Glen Innes struggle has been a vanguard of militancy, including stopping trucks from removing houses, this

is only holding onto traces of what was – while the government proceeds with its plans elsewhere.

A public housing solution requires not only atomised confrontations in various neighbourhoods, but a positive national strategy, an alternative vision of what democratically planned public housing could look like. Without a vision of the future, any serious struggle risks either co-option or valiant failure.

This issue of Fightback attempts to sketch such a vision, including outlining the importance of urban housing to ecosocialist approaches (Daphne Lawless, Urban Housing is an Ecosocialist Issue, pX-X), and specific support for marginalised communities in expanding public housing (Kassie Hartendorp, Living Outside the Rainbow, pX-X).

As the Tamaki Housing Group and other forces work to pull together a national housing strategy from Northland, to Tamaki Makaurau, to rebuilding Otautahi/Christchurch (pX-X) – we hope to contribute to developing this strategy.

About Fightback

Under our current system, democracy consists of a vote every 3 years. Most of our lives are lived under dictatorship, the dictatorship of bosses and WINZ case managers. *Fightback* stands for a system in which our workplaces, our schools, our universities are run democratically, for social need rather than private profit.

Fightback participates in the MANA Movement, whose stated mission is to bring “rangatiratanga to the poor, the powerless and the dispossessed.” Capitalism was imposed in Aotearoa through colonisation, and the fight for indigenous self-determination is intimately connected with the fight for an egalitarian society. We also maintain an independent Marxist organisation outside of parliament, to offer a vision of a world beyond the parliamentary capitalist system.

Fightback stands against all forms of oppression. We believe working-class power, the struggle of the majority for self-determination, is the basis for ending all forms of oppression. However, we also recognise that daily inequities such as sexism must be addressed here and now, not just after the revolution.

Fightback is embedded in a range of struggles on the ground; including building a fighting trade union movement, movements for gender and sexual liberation, and anti-racism.

Fightback also publishes a monthly magazine, and a website, to offer a socialist perspective on ongoing struggles.

Fightback stands for struggle, solidarity and socialism.

Fightback
Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism

Monthly magazine published by: **Fightback**

Fightback Issue 1 2015,
Vol.3, No 1, Issue No 17

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Fightback

Fightback plans for 2015 and beyond

Fightback members gathered in Akaroa over the weekend of the 23rd-25th of January, to discuss the future direction of the organisation. Although turnout was certainly modest, participants made a number of resolutions which we hope will provide a firm strategic basis for Fightback's work in the coming period.

Programme

The conference resolved that Fightback is based on a political programme, which is not only a set of goals for social change but a plan of action to bring them around. Fightback seeks alliances with other progressive forces and organisations of the oppressed and working class, to develop and enact this programme. The purpose of Fightback is putting our programme into action in political activism, amending it in line with experience, and training its membership in Marxist theory and practice. As a basis for this work, members passed the following 10 Point Programme:

1. Constitutional transformation based on Tino Rangatiratanga, Mana Motuhake and workers' power. Tangata whenua and community co-ops to operate as kaitiaki over public resources.
2. Secure jobs for all who are ready to work, with a living wage and a shorter working week.
3. The benefit system to be replaced with a universal basic income.
4. Full rights for migrant workers.
5. Opposition to all imperialist intervention and alliances, including the New Zealand state's participation in military occupations and the Five Eyes agreement.
6. No revolution without women's liberation. Full funding for sexual violence prevention and survivor sup-

port, free access to all reproductive technologies. For socialist-feminist solutions to the marginalisation of all gender minorities, within the movement and in society.

7. For an ecosocialist solution to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport.
8. For freedom of technology and information. Expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to Government spying on our own citizens and on others. End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons centred on producers and users.
9. Abolish prisons, replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
10. Free health-care and education at every level, run by those directly affected. In healthcare; remove inequities in accident compensation, move towards health system based on informed consent, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour. In education; full public funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining education in te tiriti and te reo.

Recent years have seen an offensive struggle against casualisation in previously unorganised sectors such as hospitality, alongside a defensive struggle against casualisation in 'traditional' union sectors. This accompanies a decline in participation in mass organisations, in a period of neoliberal entrenchment. Fightback passed a basic Union/Workplace Policy as a guideline for members in various sectors of the workforce and union movement.

Union/Workplace Policy

Fightback members in unions should fight for:

- Unionism that is proactive. Workplace-driven action to improve the pay, conditions and power of workers.
- Unions as political vehicles, taking up progressive causes outside of their immediate industry or work-site.
- Unrestricted right to strike, including solidarity strikes.
- Unions that represent and fight for all workers; full rights for migrant workers, no tolerance of sexist or abusive behaviour.
- Unions that are democratically controlled, with regular members' meetings, election of officials, ballots where appropriate. Opposition to 'corporate' or 'service' union structures -members are not clients, they are the union.
- Unions where officials take the average wage of their industry, and see members' interests as their interests.
- Unions which are politically independent of the Labour Party.

Fightback members who work as officials for unions are expected to represent and fight for these politics from their position.

Where union members overwhelmingly take a contrasting position (for example supporting affiliation to the Labour Party), Fightback members should support union democracy, but continue to argue for their position.

Alliances

Comrades agreed to initiate a series of broad monthly forums with groups including the ISO, Hobgoblin, MANA, the 'Left Think-tank', and other individuals and groups.

Additionally, comrades resolved to initiate a process of debate and discussion with the ISO to test strategic possibilities for organisational unity.

Fightback also recommitted to participating in the MANA movement, as a vehicle for linking the struggles for Maori Sovereignty and socialism. As members of this movement, Fightback committed to developing a Mana Wahine policy and wahine caucuses. Finally, in line with the aim of supporting Maori sovereignty, Fightback committed to sending members to the 175th anniversary of Te Tiriti at Waitangi.

Fightback aims to be a socialist-feminist organisation. In line with this, the conference passed a Safer Spaces policy, as part of an attempt to challenge sexism within the movement. Comrades also resolved to investigate possibilities for a nationwide campaign for consent education in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Finally, Fightback endorsed Sue Bradford's proposal for a left-wing think-tank, and committed to a small monthly financial contribution to this project.

Organisation

Online forums offer opportunities for participation aside from weekly branch meetings. Participants amended the membership policy from a requirement to "attend branch meetings" to "work in collaboration with Fightback structures," alongside agreement with the 10 Point Programme, and minimum dues of a \$10 monthly sustaining subscription to the magazine.

Fightback continues to publish a printed magazine, but the bulk of readers engage through the website and social media. Participants resolved to use our social media platforms for more rapid tactical responses, while using the magazine for longer-term analysis. Fightback therefore endorsed a less regular magazine publication schedule, with themed issues including a crowd-funded issue dedicated to women's writing.



Housing

Housing under neoliberalism



Protesters in Glen Innes occupy a state house.

Joel Cosgrove (Whanganui a Tara/Wellington).

It is a generally acknowledged political fact that housing is unaffordable. Within the awkward blame shuffling and finger pointing, MANA's policy of building 10,000 well-built and insulated homes per year until demand for affordable housing was satisfied, was a good policy. The policy called for an expansion of state-housing. Yet the Internet-MANA alliance also endorsed renting-to-own, a policy which maintains the need for private home ownership.

The nature of private home ownership
Why do people want to rent-to-own? In part because there is no surety now in state housing tenancies, with the National government revoking the right to lifetime tenancies, and the opposition Labour Party raising barely a whisper of opposition. The current alternatives to private home ownership are the vagaries and insecurity of private renting or the

modern, run-down state housing ghettos, the product of budget cutting and under-maintenance by both National and Labour governments over the past thirty years.

The collapse of state housing as a serious alternative to private rentals makes for grim reading. Currently, 3,700 of 68,460 current state houses are empty, with a majority ready to be immediately occupied.

The current situation has its origins in the massive attacks on workers' conditions that were carried out in the early 90's. The CTU estimates that if pay rates had kept up with productivity rates, the average wage would be \$35.91 per hour as opposed to \$28.20 currently, a gap of over 20%.

Alongside attacks on wages and benefits was a massive escalation of house prices and housing-based debt. According to the Reserve Bank, household debt has increased from around 60% of disposable income, to around 144%. Around

97% of that debt is in housing.

To a certain extent, as long as you were able to maintain ownership of a house, you could leverage the increasing value of housing (which is now 75% above its historical value), swimming on debt in the assumption that capital gains from the sale of the house would bring a tidy profit. In Auckland alone, average house prices have risen from \$340,000 in 2004 to over \$700,000 in 2014. Those with houses have profited mightily. Those without have had to weather continual rent increases.

With average national house prices having risen by over \$30,000 in the last year, and average wages by only \$1500, the gap between those who own houses and those who don't is only increasing. The Dominion Post reported in August this year that investors who already own ten properties or more brought two out of every five homes on the market.

That the overwhelming amount of household debt is property-based

further demonstrates the divide – those with property have potential access to hundreds of thousands, while those without are left with credit cards, overdrafts and loan sharks.

Stable living standards are increasingly tied to atomised individual asset ownership, as opposed to a collective process of winning wage increases in worksites. This is a departure from the historical period of Fordism, with its large industrial worksites, with relatively clear identity, tied in part to collective work.

While speculation on properties increases, and rents increase, rents are (relatively) constrained by wage growth. This leaves a yawning gap between the going price of a property and what can be charged in rent for it.

We live in a country of abysmal housing, with the recent Housing Warrant of Fitness survey finding that 94% failed on at least one of 31 criteria that they were judged across. Criteria included weather-tightness, insulation and ventilation, lighting, heating, condition of appliances and general building safety. Yet the system of housing speculation specifically pushes people to provide the bare minimum to maintain their properties, as the point of houses is not primarily to be lived in, but to appreciate in value and make money for the owner.

Social base of the National Party

There was a lot of (important) talk of the missing million at the most recent election; non-voters uninspired by the options on offer, largely the most poor and marginal. Another million is also important, namely the million who have voted for the National Party over the past three elections.

National is favoured by business; however this is not the whole story. Ninety-seven percent of the 112 chief executives who responded to an NZ Herald 'Mood of the Boardroom' 2014 survey indicated support for National leader John Key. However, that only accounts for 108 votes all told.

Debt encumbered home owners, although being rich on paper, are nonetheless in a precarious position – one needs only to look at the sudden fall of Terry Serepisos – and this ties them to the status quo. This is social pacification, binding people to a capitalist hegemony.

Building state houses, until demand for affordable and safe housing is met, would cut at the base of a significant part of New Zealand society. Currently there are over 570,000 homes rented out, according to Statistics NZ. This is a question of billions of dollars in yearly rents and hundreds of billions in speculative value. The National Party allays

the anxieties of middle-class and other property owners operating on a speculative bubble.

Fighting for public housing

In seeking to reverse the upward redistribution of wealth, we call for more and better state houses.

A serious public-housing building programme would make a major difference to the overcrowding and poverty-related illnesses that currently exist within New Zealand. It would also undercut the dependence on speculation as a basis for security.

On one hand, there is something to be said for satisfying people's desire for security in housing. On the other hand, by upholding private housing, there is a danger that those trying to challenge the situation end up being absorbed into the status quo. We need to be clear about the need for a public, collective solution to the housing crisis.

Whatever private home ownership might have meant in the 70's, it increasingly serves class stratification. Those with access to property profit from those without.

The human need for shelter plays only a secondary role at best in this dynamic.

Housing: Foreign ownership is not the problem

Ian Anderson (Whanganui a Tara/Wellington).

Bankers warned early this year of a drop in property prices; a bust to follow the boom. It would be overconfident to pick an exact date. But when (rather than if) the crash comes, we need to understand the fundamental problem if we can

hope to address it.

One narrative places the blame on foreigners. The New Zealand Labour Party recently threatened to bar non-residents from buying existing residential homes. Strangely, Australian investors were excluded; if speculation is the problem, why not restrict all investors?

Labour's policy is symptomatic of a

general tendency to scapegoat foreigners (particularly Asians) for deeper economic problems. Local investors still routinely donate to the Labour Party; foreigners are easier to blame.

Another form of scapegoating blames immigration itself for the housing shortage. A number of letters to the editor in the mainstream press have suggested that migration be reduced

Housing

or halted until the housing shortage is remedied.

This generalised anti-foreign sentiment obscures class divisions. A “non-resident” may be an economic migrant, moving to New Zealand for work, not yet past the red tape of legal residency, and trying, along with other low-income earners, to find affordable accommodation while facing the additional burden of discrimination by landlords. As Labour indicates, “non-residents” may also be overseas property speculators with no plan to live here.

Locals also speculate on the housing market, gambling with houses they never plan to live in. Depending on who you listen to, foreign buyers own around 4% (according to property investor Peter Thompson) or 7-10% (according to former Labour leader David Shearer) of homes in Aotearoa/NZ. This is less than a quarter of all homes owned by non-occupiers; around 40% and counting according to Statistics NZ.

It’s worth distinguishing here between personal property and private property. Understandably, many want ‘a place of their own’, as distinct from a commodity to trade. As Marx and Engels underline in *The Communist Manifesto*, capitalism itself abolishes and undermines many forms of personal property:

“We Communists have been reproached with the desire of abolishing the right of personally acquiring property as the fruit of a man’s own labour, which prop-

erty is alleged to be the groundwork of all personal freedom, activity and independence.

Hard-won, self-acquired, self-earned property! Do you mean the property of petty artisan and of the small peasant, a form of property that preceded the bourgeois form? There is no need to abolish that; the development of industry has to a great extent already destroyed it, and is still destroying it daily.”

Capitalist private property means that the ‘value’ of houses can be anonymously exchanged, sold on for personal gain. Marxists call this the contradiction between ‘use value’ (a place to stay) and ‘exchange value’ (a property to sell). Although house prices are partly a problem of supply and demand, there are by most estimates more empty houses than homeless people; the drive for profit is the fundamental problem.

It’s tempting to simply portray bankers and other financial institutions as parasitic; they don’t produce anything. While some (often anti-Semitic) conspiracy theories suggest that bankers are perverting the natural course of capitalism, profitable financial institutions are necessary to generalised capitalist production. Banks centralise the means of exchange, and lend out the initial capital for private production:

“When the system of exchange is relatively simple, the personal knowledge and trust of individual capitalists may

guarantee the quality of debts incurred, but in a complex market system this cannot form an adequate foundation for the credit system. The bank seeks to institutionalize what was before a matter of personal trust and credibility.” (David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital*).

Banks and financial institutions must also make a profit – which means interest, predatory lending, speculation, incentives to gamble with workers’ lives as poker chips. Trade in houses as commodities undermines the right to affordable housing, driving further extension of credit. Debt operates as a form of social pacification for an anxious middle class operating on a speculative bubble (Joel Cosgrove, *Housing Under Neoliberalism*, pX-X). Ninety per cent of private debt is in housing.

Alongside proposing to bar non-residents from buying houses, Labour also proposed a Capital Gains Tax. As a direct tax on profiteering, this is a better policy than xenophobic scapegoating. That said, many countries, including the US and UK, already have a Capital Gains Tax – speculation and property booms still run rampant. Market mechanisms cannot address a problem produced by the market.

Only strict restrictions on market activity, combined with a democratically planned expansion of public housing, can begin to address the root of the crisis. Capitalist parties will not grant this willingly.

Desperate people: Christchurch’s slum dwellers

Byron Clark, Fightback (Outautahi/Christchurch).

Desperation is the word that best describes the situation in Christchurch for those with insecure housing. In the years following the series of earthquakes that destroyed a third of buildings in

the central city, as well as many in the suburbs particularly in the east of the city, large numbers of people were displaced. At first housing-related protests were held frequently; however the core of these protests were homeowners angry with insurance companies or the Earthquake Commission (EQC) for

slow speeds with repairs and rebuilds. It was not unusual to hear a speaker at one of these rallies talk about having to move out of their home and into their investment property – what happened to their now former tenants was not mentioned. The plight of the homeless was discussed only at these rallies as

a sort of add-on at the end of a list of grievances, to add weight to the “main issues”.

One of the last major actions of Occupy Christchurch was a rally around the theme of housing as a human right, taking place at the electorate office of Earthquake Recovery minister Gerry Brownlee, a local landlord. The Occupy movement had become a place welcoming to the city’s homeless, but had been deliberately excluded from EQC-related protests by organisers concerned about the public image of their events.

With the internal problems of Occupy Christchurch at that stage, and the difficulties that come with having no fixed abode, no larger movement grew out of the brief occupation of Brownlee’s lawn. Many people adapted to the ‘new normal’. The population of North Canterbury swelled as people moved further away from their workplaces (plans for a commuter train were made by the regional council, but ultimately scrapped) caravans and portable buildings popped up on front lawns, students decided living with their parents another year was their best bet and young couples kept flatting rather than renting a place to themselves.

Meanwhile, workers flooded in from around the country and overseas to rebuild the city, also in need of accommodation. Building consents have been granted to create villages of single-bed-

room units to house these workers, such as Cressy, (named after the ship which carried labourers to build the city in the 1850s). But for the most part these villages have yet to open.

With much of the city’s social housing damaged, and recently arrived tradespeople filling boarding houses, the people who pre-quake were at the bottom of the heap – recovering addicts, recently released prisoners, people discharged from psychiatric wards without the needed level of care in the community – were still at the bottom of the heap, only now the bottom was lower than it had been before, when at least a council flat was a possibility.

Into this situation stepped opportunists like Craig Skilling. A former car wrecker who filled the site of his failed business with chemical toilets, caravans, converted buses and shipping containers, Skilling told *The Press* he housed people “no-one else wants”.

“I have no problems because I run it like a jail. The tenants ring the police on me. I have had the cops down here with guns to my head and everything. I’m not doing this for no c..t except me. It’s called survival,” he told the paper when it reported his “hovel” was likely to face closure. “I’m the one who is going to lose the most. I don’t care where they go. These people don’t care about me. I don’t care about them. I’m providing a service.”

In the article Skilling comes across as a horrible person, but there are hints he was not always that way. “I have to go out my door and flick a switch in my brain and turn into a totally different person,” he told the reporter. He also lives on the site himself, with his partner and three children.

While Skilling is a failed businessman who became a slumlord, in Wellington more successful businessmen – and Brownlee is not the only landlord – are privatising state housing and blocking attempts at policies like a rental warrant of fitness. Skilling’s site is being closed not because it is a slum, but primarily because regulations only permit one residence on a commercial site.

Social housing NGO’s (non-government organisations) are in line to purchase privatised housing and take advantage of income-related rents previously only available to state house tenants, and are therefore unlikely to kick up a fuss. The left-leaning city council voters elected in 2013 has talked of more social housing, but this has been delayed, in part due to a \$1.2 billion funding shortfall which saw the council abruptly change course and embark on a there-is-no-alternative style austerity and privatisation agenda which could see charges for water use while rates increase. We can be sure those increases will be passed on to tenants.



A homeless couple asleep in the dunes at New Brighton beach.

International

Venezuela: Possibilities and challenges

During the 2014 election, MANA proposed building 10,000 new state houses a year. As the National government heads in the opposite direction, it can be hard to imagine a world in which this is viable.

These snapshots of Venezuela highlight the possibilities opened up by a revolutionary process in political and civil society, as well as threats faced by any successful revolutionary movement. If a historically poor nation threatened by US domination can do it, perhaps we can too.

November 2014: 642,000 Public Houses Built in Venezuela since 2011

By Rachael Boothroyd, teleSUR correspondent.

A total of 642,000 public housing units have been built and handed over to some of the poorest families in Venezuela since the government launched its mass Housing Mission in 2011, confirmed the country's Minister of Eco-Socialism, Housing and Environment, Ricardo Molino.

According to the minister, another 217,000 residences are still in construction, a number which the government hopes to see increased to 350,000 before the end of the year.

"We are in the process of starting to build new houses, an extraordinary effort which is aimed at generating better living conditions for our people," said the minister.

Molina made the statements from Coche in Caracas, where the local community is currently organising as part of the government's Tricolor Barrio mission, also connected to the house building programme. Tricolor Barrio is aimed at renovating public spaces in communities and also at installing basic

services such as telephone and internet lines.

The mission relies on communities organizing themselves into communal councils in order to carry out the projects, which the government says should improve the lives of a million Venezuelans before the end of the year.

The country's Housing Programme was launched in 2011 by then President Hugo Chavez, who said the mission aimed to address the "social debt" left by decades of underdevelopment and mass urbanization which had left the majority of the population living in shantytowns or barrios on the outskirts of the country's cities. The government hopes to build a total of 3 million houses before 2019 as part of the mission, some of which will be constructed in conjunction with organized communities.

February 2015: Coup plot in Venezuela Thwarted

By Telesur English.

Coup plotters planned on assassinating the Venezuelan president and installing a de facto government.

A coup plot against the Venezuelan government has been foiled, with both civilians and members of the military detained, President Nicolas Maduro revealed Thursday in a televised address.

Those involved were being paid in U.S. dollars, and one of the suspects had been granted a visa to enter the United States should the plot fail, Maduro said.

Venezuela's president stated that the coup plotters already had a "transitional" government and program lined up once the plan, which included bombings on the Miraflores Palace and the teleSUR offices in Caracas as well as assassinations of members of the opposition, Maduro and others, was carried out.

Maduro explained that a video of

masked military officials speaking out against the government had been recorded, which was set to be released after the planned assassination was carried out.

Venezuelan Minister of Defense Vladimir Padrino Lopez stated via his Twitter account that the armed forces remain loyal to the constitutional government.

"The Bolivarian National Armed Forces remain resolute in their democratic beliefs and reject coup schemes that threaten the peace of the republic," said Padrino.

According to Maduro, one of the suspects was already under surveillance and had been suspected of plotting against the government during last year's violent demonstrations, but was not charged. Nevertheless, he continued plotting against the democratically-elected government.

The four-stage plan involved creating an economic assault on the country, creating an international debate around a supposed humanitarian crisis, a political coup involving officials who would turn on the government, and finally a military coup that would lead to the installation of the transitional program.

Maduro stated that the plot, which was scheduled to coincide with anti-government demonstrations planned for the one-year anniversary of the start of violent, opposition-led demonstrations which began last Feb. 12, was uncovered after military officials who had been approached to participate reported the schemes to authorities.

Maduro called on the Venezuelan people to be on alert and prepared to maintain peace in the country in the face of continued attempts by sectors of the right wing who seek to overthrow the democratically-elected government.

Urban Housing is an Ecosocialist Issue



Daphne Lawless (Fightback, Tamaki Makaurau)

We need green, sustainable and affordable solutions to the housing problem. But that means more urbanisation, not less.

It's obvious that there is a great shortage of quality, affordable housing in Aotearoa. Or to be more precise, there's a shortage in those places where people want to live. There are regular stories about houses going on TradeMe for a few hundred dollars, in places like Balclutha or other isolated rural zones.

Rural houses are great for people who can support themselves in a rural lifestyle, like farm workers or independent writers or artists. But the facts of life in a modern economy are that most of the economic growth, and therefore new jobs and opportunities, will happen in the cities – Auckland in particular, but Wellington, Christchurch and Hamilton as well. Because Auckland is where I live and expect to raise my family, it's that town which I will concentrate on in this article.

Explosive growth

Auckland's explosive growth to near 1.5 million inhabitants is exacerbated, not only by its milder climate compared to our other urban centres, but by immigration. New settlers in our country

prefer to live near to people who share their culture, hence Auckland's massively high levels of cultural diversity compared to the rest of the country. Whether Pasifika peoples in Mangere, Chinese in Botany or people from the Indian subcontinent in Sandringham, Auckland's cultural mosaic gets more complicated and colourful all the time. But Auckland's expanding population needs somewhere to live. The latest survey shows that the median house price in Auckland has passed \$670,000 – almost 15 times the median yearly income. Historically, that ratio has been stable at around four. So a house in Auckland costs almost 4 times as much as it should.

The media blame this on “a shortage of new housing”, mainly blaming Auckland Council's planning tool, like the Metropolitan Urban Limit – refusing to rezone rural areas bordering the city for new housing. But this is unfair, and pushes a political ideology which is both anti-worker, and anti-green.

One of the main problems of neoliberal capitalism is that, when wages are pushed down, workers can't buy things and the economy slows. One of the solutions – in virtually every advanced country in the world – has been to semi-deliberately create a housing bubble. Loans for buying houses have become cheap and plentiful, thus pushing up prices. Crucially, when houses prices go up, those who already own houses

(the middle and upper classes) benefit. They can buy cars or go on holidays and “put it on the mortgage”.

But even capitalist economists understand what happens when you just pump more money into a market – prices go up overall and the people at the bottom of the “housing ladder” get worse and worse off. A similar thing happens in the rental market with WINZ giving out Accommodation Supplement, a rent subsidy for those on low-to-average incomes. This money just goes on the landlord's profits and rents rise to match it.

Pricking the bubble

The housing bubble is therefore just another way of transferring wealth from the property-less to the property-owners. But even our bosses are getting nervous that we could end up in a situation like the United States or Ireland, where after the bubble burst, entire neighbourhoods became vacant after their mortgages were foreclosed on. Hence, the Reserve Bank has recently cut the availability of loans for new home-owners (once again punishing the most vulnerable so as to safeguard the gains of the greedy).

So what's a pro-worker, pro-environment solution to the housing crisis? A bursting housing bubble might bring prices down, but would also cause massive economic recession. The National

Housing

Government, aided by the right-wing media, want us to think that it's building new housing zones on the city fringes at "affordable prices" (although they are generally priced way beyond most average income earners means, let alone those on low incomes).

Let's go through all the ways that this kind of urban sprawl is ecological and economic bad news:

- New fringe suburbs encroach onto fertile farming land. Some of Auckland's best volcanic soils (such as the market gardens in Avondale) have long since been built over. Pushing development towards Pukekohe would put the food sustainability of the region under severe pressure.
- They require brand new services such as telephone, stormwater and electricity to be built, at a high cost.
- In New Zealand, new housing areas are generally built without any thought as to public transport – and generally nowhere near workplaces. Not only does this require that everyone who lives there has to own a car, but they have to commute for stupid distances across our already-clogged motorway network, turning expensive fossil fuels into air pollution as they do so.

The National Government's "special housing areas" in Auckland, such as Hobsonville Point, Flat Bush or Hingaia, are nowhere near the recently upgraded electric train services, and will all need new bus or ferry services to make it possible to live there without a car. This isn't solving the housing crisis – just opening it up to developers to profit from.

Up, not out

The alternative – as many insightful commenters on Auckland's housing issues, for example the Generation Zero pressure group, has identified – is for Auckland to grow up, not out. That is,

that new affordable, high-density (flat or apartment) housing should be built in and around the CBD and central suburbs. Amazingly enough, it's only been legal to build apartments in the Auckland CBD since 1995, and since then the population has grown to 25,000 – and, with a large population of students and creative types, it's generally a lower-income and more culturally diverse population than the ultra-rich inner 'burbs like Remuera or Herne Bay.

The rich absolutely hate this idea. The working-class population of central Auckland were systematically moved out between the 1950s and 1970s, when Freemans Bay and Newton were gutted to build the Central Motorway junction, and surrounding suburbs like Ponsonby or Grey Lynn were gentrified.

The last thing that the people who own those old "working-men's" cottages which are now worth \$1 million is for the price to be brought down by affordable apartments being built round the corner – or indeed, for working-class (usually non-white) people to live in their area at all. They'd much prefer workers out of sight and out of mind. Which is of course precisely what happened to the "old" inhabitants of Ponsonby – they ended up in living in places like Mangere or Otara.

Housing and transport, as noted above, are both aspects of the same question, as is access to public services. Auckland's liberal mayor Len Brown, elected by the working-class outer suburbs over the screams of the Parnell and Newmarket ruling classes, has staked his credibility on the Central Rail Link, an underground railway through the CBD which would greatly increase the efficiency of public transport. The Remuera brigade, rightly, see this as part and parcel of intensified housing – making urban life in Auckland more accessible, affordable and vibrant. Which is the last thing they want, in their ultra-exclusive, financially-segregated communities.

Anti-urbanism

Studying the facts, it becomes clear that to improve quality of life in Auckland, to reduce social inequalities and make life richer and more affordable for working people, centralisation, intensification and much better public transport is the affordable as well as the green solution. However, many who see themselves on the liberal side or even the Left of politics wouldn't agree.

When I interviewed MANA co-vice-president John Minto in this paper a couple of years ago, when he was running for Mayor of Auckland, he had this to say:

"They're replacing existing state housing with 8-story slums in the town centre. We've seen this happen overseas – they'll be rubbish-quality... Families need wide spaces to grow up in – they're not growing to grow up on the sixth floor of an apartment building."

There is absolutely no reason why – excluding the greed of developers and the ignorance of planners – high-density living should become a "slum" nightmare like an English "estate" or a French "cité". All that is required is people-centred and eco-friendly planning, combined with an attention to green space, sustainable transport links, and integration to the broader culture of the city.

Large apartment buildings can even be more environmentally friendly than a traditional, draughty, uninsulated Kiwi single-dweller property – especially when, as has happened in Chicago and other places, they become self-sufficient in energy by installing solar panels on their roofs. The biggest barrier to children being raised in the Auckland CBD is the lack of schools – which could be fixed by a people-centred education policy.

While John Minto is motivated by concern for the poor, other anti-intensificationists have less savoury motivations.

“Big cities” are something, for these people, which happen in other countries. Auckland, to them, is something like a cancer or a parasite on the country, and should never have been allowed to grow to its giant sprawling size (and certainly not with such ethnic diversity!).

Detroit

Some of them even suggest deliberately letting it run down and become uninhabitable, provoking a Detroit-style exodus to the other centres or the regions. This kind of ruralist or small-town mythology makes one remember

Karl Marx’s comment about the “idiocy of rural life” – by which he did not mean stupidity, but self-absorbed parochialism. “Agglomeration benefits” – the economic, cultural and environmental benefits of concentrating and enhancing the central areas of large cities – are very real. Although some will always prefer a suburban big back-yard lifestyle, the cultural benefits of living in a teeming, vibrant, culturally rich community should be open to all working people of Aotearoa/New Zealand. This is the future that the “Remuera brigade” (you’d say Thorndon or Fendalton in other cities, I suppose) hate and fear.

When they “cleared” Freeman’s Bay and Newton in the 1960s, they told the working-class and Pasifika residents that they’d never miss their old “slums” in their brand new houses in far-away Mangere and Otara. We can see how that turned out – economic apartheid, auto-dependent isolation, and a downward spiralling local economy leading to crime. It’s time to put an end to economic apartheid, and bring working people back into the centre of our urban life and culture – where they belong. The only way we can all fit sustainably is by growing our cities upwards.

Living Outside The Rainbow: Queerness and the Housing Crisis

By Kassie Hartendorp (Whanganui-a-Tara/Wellington).

When you start to peer past the rainbow flags and glitter shine of LGBTIQ ‘issues’, there are many stories to be told that don’t end with a marriage certificate and picket fences. While more privileged people along the rainbow have been able to make gains, it’s easy to forget about those who are nowhere near that pot of gold, despite ‘heart-warming’ YouTube clips from rightwing politicians and banks showing their ‘diversity and inclusion’ with their rhinestone adorned cash machines. There have been important gains made, and each one through great struggle – but we are not at the final frontier yet.

One key issue that often gets swept under the rug is housing and homelessness. The very fact that housing continues to be a need for high numbers of people across the globe means, naturally, that it affects sex, sexuality and gender diverse people as well. But the nature of homelessness can look different for our communities, and have more complex factors taking place.

The NZ Government defines homelessness as “living situations where people have no other options to acquire safe and secure housing. This includes people who are:

- without shelter
- in temporary accommodation
- sharing accommodation with a household
- living in uninhabitable housing.”

This definition goes further than the stereotype of people living on the street, and can encompass many forms of housing instability. Homelessness figures are difficult to record and track easily. Most people who are in transitional housing or are couchsurfing may not associate themselves with the label of ‘homeless’ which carries a heavy stigma – despite the fact that many have experienced it at some point in their lives. In 2009, the Housing Shareholders Advisory Group estimated that the ‘urban homeless’ or those sleeping rough, numbered less than 300 across the country, yet between 8,000 and 20,000 people were living in temporary accommodation unsuited for long term

habitation. Within the past year, service providers say that homelessness is ‘on the rise’ with an Auckland Council report claiming that about 15,000 people in Auckland are “severely housing deprived.”

With housing being a key commodity often left to a profit driven market, it is hard to envision a world under capitalism that would not have high levels of poverty, poor health and homelessness. The gap between the rich and the poor, and reliance on a ‘user pays’ system that means paying for almost everything we need to survive, create exactly the kind of conditions that leave many without affordable, stable and secure accommodation. The causes of homelessness can be heavily linked to and influenced by poverty, mental health experiences, disabilities, addiction issues, emotional health and trauma, sexuality and gender, convictions and imprisonment, unemployment or low wages, a lack of affordable housing and are underpinned by the forces of colonisation, patriarchy, racism and capitalism.

This already shows a complicated snapshot of the context that homelessness takes place in – how does this look

Housing

for people who are sex, sexuality and/or gender diverse? Figures from the USA show that 40% of homeless young people are LGBTIQ (despite being 10% of the population), yet here in Aotearoa, we don't have statistics on the state of homelessness for our communities of any age range. Anecdotally, when our friends or whanau struggle to find housing, we often take them in and support each other, but this isn't reflected on any national database.

Some of the key themes that play out in sex, sexuality and gender diverse homelessness are family breakdowns, discrimination (overt and covert) and isolation. It is a sadly normal occurrence for young people to come out and face family rejection, particularly when they are gender diverse. A common scenario exists where parents will only accept a young person back into their home if they commit to living as the gender they were assigned at birth. It is not a safe or healthy option to force someone to 'go back in the closet' or live as someone they are not, for the sake of shelter. Yet agencies such as WINZ have had trouble recognising this as a true 'relationship breakdown' in the past and have therefore refused youth payments for teenagers who cannot live in such an oppressive environment.

While poverty is almost always a key factor of general homelessness, a person of any socio-economic status can find themselves unwelcome or kicked out of a family home for their sexuality or gender identity. One of the people I spoke with, who experienced an abusive home life, says:

"I'm a migrant with rich parents who's under 21. Is anyone going to think I'm genuinely in need? My parents are pulling the 'please come home' act, refusing to give me access to my health insurance policy and telling me instead that if I'm ill they can nurse me back to health if I would only come home, and what am I meant to do?"

When family/whanau becomes a site of pain and trauma for LGBTIQ people, often the only option is to find new homes and families that will validate the parts of them that are not accepted in their former home.

Homelessness doesn't just affect young people, and there are further layers that add complexity to the issue such as race, disability and gender. With a shortage of accommodation in urban areas in particular, if you don't look 'normative', you're a person of colour, you have children or a disability - the chances are low that you will be the first pick of landlords, housing agencies or even most flatmates. Many gay or queer identifying people can downplay their sexuality, but if someone is 'non-passing' as a transgender flat-hunter, they are more likely to experience discrimination.

One interviewee based in Auckland currently shares a single bed with their girlfriend while staying in a person's storage room. They've been told they need to leave soon to make way for another transgender person, with the plan to find a new flat with three other likeminded people. So far, they have had no success in finding a safe, affordable and secure flat to move into.

"Nobody wants to rent to a bunch of visibly trans/queer disabled teenagers, even if we weren't fighting a housing market that's totally against us at the moment. Forty people showing up to flat viewings, most of whom in suit and tie or with parents as guarantors (which, as queer babies most of us are estranged from ours, or they're really poor) I can't hide how brown and neuro-divergent I am, my girlfriend can't really pass for a masculine cis dude any more, as much as she tries... I'm scared. I don't know what we're going to do."

Another interviewee who identifies as takataapui taahine and is identified by others as transgender, queer and Maori,

says that homelessness is something they are "intimately acquainted with." From crashing on sofas, staying in vans and squatting in old sheds and abandoned homes as a teenager, their housing stability as an adult started improving after becoming a sex worker, which helped clear their debt and provided an income that didn't depend on seasonal opportunities. They state that:

"Even now though, with my stable job working at an NGO, I am aware that my position is always precarious... I definitely see my expendability as intrinsically linked to being poor, brown, visibly not a heterosexual cis person. It's indisputably also linked to disability, or directly because of discrimination against it... My family have no money for me to fall back on. I've recently been kicked out of my house because my neighbour complained that my autistic son throws toys and fruit over the fence. I don't imagine this situation unfolding in this way if I were a more wealthy, middle aged, white, cis, man or woman."

There are almost no safety nets for people who have intersecting battles and experiences, that don't fit neatly into common 'gay' experience. While communities try hard to support each other, there are not many official options. In Wellington, there is already a shortage of temporary emergency accommodation and many of the services that do exist are run by faith-based organisations that have a chequered history with sexual and gender minorities. What is available for those that cannot viably utilise the Men's Night Shelter or Women's Boarding House due to their gender identity? How is the safety of LGBTIQ people guaranteed, particularly when they may be fleeing trauma, discrimination and violence in the first place?

Sandra Dickson, a long-time advocate

for sexual violence prevention, also notes that abusive domestic partnerships can become even more dangerous to those that do not have alternative housing options. Dickson says that the impact of 'having no family of origin to return to because of homo/bi/transphobia and gender policing' on people who experience intimate partner violence is under-discussed. Statistics from the UK show that same-sex attracted people experience intimate partner violence at the same rate or higher than heterosexual people, bisexual women experience higher rates of sexual violence, and transgender people are most likely of all to experience any form of violence. Without the resources to quantify this information in Aotearoa, it's difficult to piece together a formal picture on how domestic violence looks for LGBTIQ+ communities, let alone to begin to work on strategies for support and prevention.

"He kokonga whare e kitea, he
kokonga ngakau e kore e kitea"

The corners of a house can be seen, but not the corners of the heart.

Te Mahana, the Strategy to End Homelessness in Wellington, writes that "if the issue of homelessness is to be adequately addressed for Maori, it is vital that deeper needs such as spiritual, relationships and cultural connection must also be identified, considered and satisfied" and that the heart of the issue is "cultural dislocation and loss of cultural connection." The link between colonisation, poverty and homelessness runs strong and is hard to address within a setting of profit-driven capitalism and a collective historical amnesia regarding land theft and severe cultural grievances at the hands of colonisers.

The ability to find a safe and secure place to rest one's head goes further than physical walls, it is about having a papakainga, turangawaewae and a place to physically and spiritually rest, settle and heal. Capitalism doesn't, by nature, build us homes or papakainga. It doesn't

Why you should get involved in Fightback

We stand for freedom

We believe that socialism means the maximum possible freedom for the many not the few. We directly challenge infringements on basic human rights such as the undemocratic use of trespass orders by universities and employers against activists and trade unionists. We have consistently op-

posed the so-called "terror raids" on left-wing and Maori activists dating from October 2007. We also practise what we preach in our own party, where members have the right to disagree and debate their differences, provided they are involved in a basic level of party activity.

We hold capitalism responsible for the environmental crisis

The capitalist drive for unlimited profit threatens to destroy the whole basis of life on Earth. In contrast to the capitalist parties (including the Green Party) who demand that workers reduce their living standards for the sake of the planet, we say that it is the capitalist system that must be

challenged, since most environmental damage is a result of production, not consumption. We look to examples of working-class actions like the "green bans" initiated by New South Wales building labourers in the 1970s for inspiration on how workers can change the priorities of society.

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Housing/Fightback Appeal

instinctively nurture us culturally, physically, emotionally, socially or spiritually – we have to fight to be seen as anything other than one-dimensional beings that must spend the majority of our time doing meaningless work to survive, rather than living, exploring, creating and re-generating ourselves, our families and our communities. Sara Fraser, Housing Research Assistant says that one of the things she has learnt whilst working in housing research is:

“Providing people with good tenure of housing is a pathway to better health and this is as important in our queer communities as elsewhere. We are overrepresented in the suicide and mental health statistics; social housing is one avenue which provides secure tenure, but with the current government having a hands-off approach to housing, I don't see how the statistics will drop.”

With the National Government's plans to sell off state housing to NGOs, rather

than focusing on building new homes, the housing crisis around Aotearoa doesn't look set to ease in the near future. Creating safe, secure and stable housing for sexual and gender minorities isn't compatible with a housing market that is highly competitive, when non-normative bodies and existences are policed or discriminated against. A democratic, public housing solution must ensure both universal access and specific kinds of support; 'an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all'. When asked what safe and secure housing would be like to an interviewee, they replied:

“I imagine housing security for me personally, looks like living in a community where people care about each other's wellbeing, where a homeless person doesn't exist because resources are shared, and where circumstances are recognised and we don't imagine that we all exist from a zero sum starting point.”

Let's continue to create more room for possibilities and imaginings as this, where we dream of and demand more than the narrow and damaging options that are currently given to us. Let's question the economic conditions that prioritise profits over quality of life, and let's continue in creating true papakain-ga for our communities.

** Thank you to those who shared their stories, thoughts and research as contribution to this article. Arohanui to those who live this, and to those who dedicate their lives to supporting others through this.*

*** This article is used in reference to, inspired and shaped by Te Whare Tapa Wha, the Maori health model developed by Professor Mason Durie.*

If you are sex or gender diverse (intersex or transgender) and currently needing emergency accommodation in Wellington/Te Whanganui-a-Tara, feel free to contact the Temporary Emergency Accommodation Project at the 128 Radical Community Social Centre.

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